CHAPTER 2

Aging population in Russia

Population

How many brothers and sisters do you have? How many brothers and sisters did your parents or grandparents have? Did they have more, fewer, or the same number of siblings as yourself? How many children do you have, or intend to have? Is that figure larger, smaller, or the same number as your parents and grandparents had?

The typical family in a more developed country (MDC) today contains fewer people than in the past, and the number of children is declining. In much of North America and Europe a majority of people have the same number or fewer siblings than their parents and grandparents. And the number of children your generation has, or will have, appears to be fewer on average, although only the future can reveal the actual trend.

In other regions of the world the number of children per household tends to be much higher than in the MDCs. The ability of less developed countries (LDCs) to provide food, clothing, and shelter for their people is severely hampered by the continued rapid growth of their population.

A study of population is the basis for understanding a wide variety of issues in human geography. To study the challenge of increasing the food supply, reducing pollution, and encouraging economic growth, geographers must ask where and why a region's population is distributed as it is. Therefore, our study of human geography begins with a study of population.

KEY ISSUES

1. Where is the world's population distributed?
2. Where has the world's population increased?
3. Why is population increas at different rates in differ countries?
4. Why might the world fac an overpopulation proble

CASE STUDY

Population Growth in India

The Phatak family lives in a village of 600 inhabitants in India. At age 40, Indira Phatak has been pregnant five times. Four of her children have survived; they are aged 5 to 18.

When the two Phatak daughters marry a few years from now, how many children will each of them bear? The Indian government hopes that they will choose to have fewer children than their mother. About 27 million babies will be born this year in India, and the country's population is growing by 19 million annually. Unless attitudes and behavior drastically change in the next few years, India's population—currently more than 1 billion—would exceed 1.6 billion in 2050.

Three-fourths of Indians live in rural settlements that have fewer than 5,000 inhabitants. For many of these people, children are an economic asset because they help perform chores on the farm and are expected to provide for their parents in their old age. The high percentage of children who will die before they reach working age also encourages large families. One out of every 17 infants in India dies within 1 year of birth, and 150,000 women die annually during pregnancy and childbirth.

In recent years India has made significant progress in diffusing modern agricultural practices, building new industry, and developing natural resources, all of which have increased national wealth. However, in a country with a rapidly expanding population, much of the newly created wealth must be used to provide food, housing, and other basic services for the additional people. With more than one-third of the population under the age of 15, the government must build schools, hospitals, and day-care centers. Therefore, the growing wealth is going primarily to provide a reasonable standard of living for an expanding population. Further, will employment be available to these nearly 400 million children when they are old enough to work?

The study of population is critically important for three reasons:

- More people are alive at this time—about $6\frac{3}{4}$ billion—than at any point in Earth's long history.
- The world's population increased at a faster rate during the second half of the twentieth century than ever before in history.
- Virtually all global population growth is concentrated in LDCs.

These facts lend urgency to the task of understanding the diversity of population problems in the world today.

The scientific study of population characteristics is **demography.** Demographers look statistically at how people are distributed spatially and by age, gender, occupation, fertility, health, and so on.

As introduced in Chapter 1, geographers ask "where" and "why" questions. As we begin our study of the major topics in human geography, note the wording of the four key issues that organize the material in this chapter. The first two issues ask "where" questions, the second two ask "why" questions. These four issues rely on the five basic concepts presented in Chapter 1.

Geographers study population problems by first describing ***where*** people are found across Earth's ***space.*** The location of Earth's $6\frac{3}{4}$ billion people forms regular distributions. The second key issue looks at another "where" question, this time the ***places*** where population is growing.

The chapter then turns to explaining ***why*** population is growing at different rates in different places. From the perspective of ***globalization,*** geographers argue that the world's so-called **overpopulation** problem is not simply a matter of the total number of people on Earth but also includes the relationship between the number of people and the availability of resources. Problems result when an area's population exceeds the capacity of the environment to support it at an acceptable standard of living.

At a local ***scale,*** geographers find that overpopulation is a threat in some ***regions*** of the world but not in others. The capacity of Earth as a whole to support human life may be high, but some regions have a favorable balance between people and available resources, whereas others do not. Further, the regions with the most people are not necessarily the same as the regions with an unfavorable balance between population and resources.

The final key issue explains why geographers consider ***local diversity*** in growth rates to be important. Some demographers predict that the world may become overburdened with too

many people in the future. They ask whether the world's population will exceed the capacity of Earth to provide food, space, and resources for the people. Geographers who specialize in demography cannot offer a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but they recognize the ***connections*** among regions of high and low population growth, discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

KEY ISSUE 1

Where Is the World's Population Distributed?

- Population concentrations
- Sparsely populated regions
- Population density

Human beings are not distributed uniformly across Earth's surface. We can understand how population is distributed by examining two basic properties—concentration and density. Geographers identify regions of Earth's surface where population is clustered and regions where it is sparse. We also construct several density measures to help geographers explain the relationship between the number of people and available resources.

Population Concentrations

Two-thirds of the world's inhabitants are clustered in four regions—East Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Western Europe. The clustering of the world's population can be displayed on a cartogram, which depicts the size of countries according to population rather than land area, as is the case with most maps (Figure 2–1). The shapes of several large or populous countries, including Brazil, Canada, China, Indonesia, Russia, and the United States, have been exaggerated to show the regions within the countries where most of the population is clustered.

When compared to a more typical equal-area map, such as that shown in Figure 2–2, the population cartogram displays the major population clusters of Europe and East, South, and Southeast Asia as much larger, and Africa and the Western Hemisphere as much smaller. As you look at maps of population growth and other topics in this and subsequent chapters, pay special attention to Asia and Europe, because global patterns are heavily influenced by conditions in these regions, where two-thirds of the world's people live.

The four regions display some similarities. Most of the people in these regions live near an ocean or near a river with easy access to an ocean, rather than in the interior of major landmasses (refer to Figure 1–14). In fact, approximately two-thirds of the world's population live within 500 kilometers (300 miles) of an ocean, and four-fifths live within 800 kilometers (500 miles). The four population clusters occupy generally low-lying areas, with fertile soil and temperate

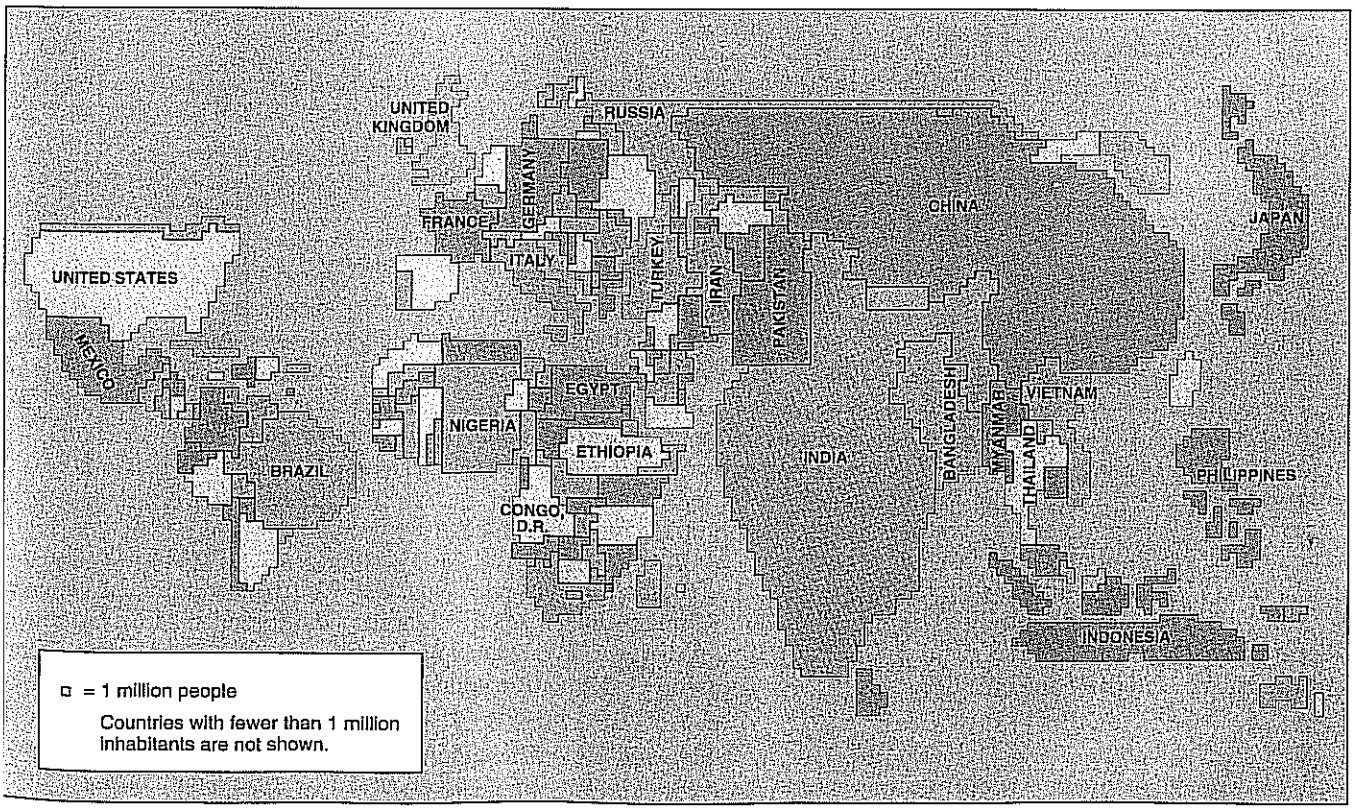

FIGURE 2–1 Population cartogram. Countries are displayed by size of population rather than land area. Countries named on the cartogram have at least 50 million inhabitants.